MAN A CONDEMNED PRISONER, AND CHRIST THE STRONG HOLD TO SAVE HIM:

Being the Subſtance of a

SERMON

Preached at the

ASSIZES

HELD AT

KINGSTON, in SURRY;

BEFORE

The Hon. Sir SIDNEY STAFFORD SMYTHE, one of the Barons of his Majeſty's Court of Exchequer, on Thurſday March 16, 1769.

And Publiſhed at the Deſire of the HIGH SHERIFF.

By H. VENN, M. A.
Vicar of HUDDERSFIELD.

LONDON:

Printed for E. and C. DILLY, in the Poultry; G. KEITH, in Grace-church-ſtreet; W. HARRIS, in St. Paul's Church-yard; and J. GURNEY, in Holborn. MDCCLXIX.

DOES A CONDEMNED PRISONER, ARE
CALLED THE STRONG HOLD TO HAVE
HIM.

Being the Sentence of a

S E R M O N

Preached at the

A S S I Z E S

HELD AT

KINGSTON, in SURRY;

BEFORE

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one of the Barons of his Majesty's Court of
Exchequer, on Thursday, March 16, 1760.

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TO

JOHN THORNTON, ESQ.

OF CLAPHAM,

HIGH SHERIFF

FOR THE

COUNTY OF SURRY,

THIS SERMON

IS

INSCRIBED

BY

HIS MUCH OBLIGED

AND

VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

H. VENN.

TO

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ZECK. ix. 12.

Turn ye to the ſtrong hold, ye priſoners of hope, for to-day do I declare, I will render unto thee double.

APPOINTED to addreſs you, ſirs, on this ſolemn occaſion, when the miniſters of GOD, to us for good, are going to ſit in judgment; when many criminals muſt hear at the bar, the fatal ſentence due to their deeds; when every feeling heart muſt melt at the ſight of their fellow-creature covered with ignominy; and every chriſtian anticipate the day of his own appearance before the judgment ſeat of CHRIST: On this occaſion, I could chuſe no ſubject more proper, than what the text offers to our conſideration. It is introduced by one of thoſe clear prophecies of the incarnation of GOD, which are the glory of the Bible itſelf: a prophecy, deſcribing in the moſt captivating manner, the Redeemer's perſon and work; the boundleſs empire of peace and felicity He came to eſtabliſh; and the rapturous acclamations, with which his bleſſed advent muſt be welcomed by the church.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion: ſhout, O daughter of Jeruſalem: behold thy king cometh unto thee. He is juſt and having ſalvation: lowly, and riding upon an aſs, and a colt the foal of an aſs: he ſhall ſpeak peace unto the heathen, aud his dominion ſhall be from ſea to ſea; and from the river to the ends of the earth.

Upon this character of CHRIST, the gracious command in the text is founded: *Turn to the ſtrong hold, ye priſoners of hope, for to day do I declare, I will render unto thee double.*

In this ſcripture, man's guilty and miſerable condition as a ſinner is emphatically declared; and his immediate deliverance out of this ſtate by turning to CHRIST the Lord, promiſed. Each of theſe important truths demand our moſt earneſt attention. I ſhall, therefore, now produce the proof of both, and conclude with an application of the ſubject, to every man's conſcience in the ſight of GOD.

1. Man's natural condition of guilt and miſery as a ſinner, is declared here with great force. For, without difference or exception, we are all called by the reproachful name of *priſoners*: A name given to every individual of the human race, becauſe in the character, the feelings, and the treatment, which ſadly diſtinguiſh capital offenders, we all ſtand as deeply

deeply involved as they themſelves. Upon the compariſon this can never be denied. Are they in general of a character notoriouſly vile; of a ſpirit totally depraved; and for their evil deeds muſt be cut off by the ſword of juſtice? The ſame dreadful charge is true againſt me, againſt you, and every inhabitant of this earth, reſpecting our character, our practice, and our deſert in relation to GOD. Pride and ſelf-love, 'tis confeſſed, wrathfully reſent ſuch an accuſation; and the world's favourite writers, draw man's picture in flattering colours, as endued with natural inclinations to goodneſs, and virtue. But upon examination, this, inſtead of weakening, moſt evidently confirms the charge; becauſe it proves, that the children of men, like audacious felons, are hardy enough to plead their own innocence, even when infallible witneſſes confront them. For what witneſſes deſerve this name, if not the teſtimony of GOD's word, and our own eyes? The teſtimony of GOD is abſolutely contrary to theſe popular and pernicious flatterers. Hear how ſtrong and peremptory is his arraignment of the whole human race: *The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men* (comprehending in one view all the generations which ſhould ever live upon the globe) *to ſee if there was any that did underſtand and ſeek GOD.* The report upon enquiry is

this awful one, *They are all gone aſide: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doth good, no not one* *. This divine teſtimony in proof of the total baſeneſs of man's natural condition, is confirmed by ocular demonſtration. We ſee every one turn to his *own* way, a ſelfiſh, headſtrong appetite having full dominion over him. We ſee in trade, in every profeſſion, frauds abounding; men ſtriving to ſupplant each other by every artifice; and all the watchfulneſs ſelf-preſervation itſelf can excite, is ſcarce ſufficient to guard againſt ruinous impoſition and deceit. We ſee no perſons of knowledge in the world, will ever confide merely in the integrity of their fellow-creatures for the ſurrender of a valuable depoſit; for the payment of a conſiderable ſum of money; for the faithful diſcharge of an important truſt. Witneſſes, oaths, and penalties are called in, yet all prove too weak a barrier againſt the ſelfiſh and evil deſigns of men. You will ſay, are there then none to be found full of principles of juſtice, humanity, and

* The Holy Ghoſt by St. Paul, Rom. iii. 10, 11. cites this paſſage to prove the univerſal corruption of mankind, till they are made righteous through the righteouſneſs and grace of GOD. But this would be of all abſurdities the moſt abſurd, was this paſſage to be reſtrained as a deſcription only of ſome local and temporary depravity, which prevailed when David lived.

honour,

honour, till renewed by the grace of GOD? I anſwer, doubtleſs many. But let theſe amiable characters be brought to the touchſtone of all real worth, and they will be found as vile as thoſe who defraud and injure their fellow-creatures. For is not unbounded confidence in the promiſes of GOD; ever ardent gratitude for his goodneſs, above all for the work of redemption? Is not a conſtant delight in his tranſcendent excellencies; an entire devotedneſs to his bleſſed ſervice; a deep ſenſe of the infinite value of his favor, and of the unutterable infamy, as well as miſery, of living in contradiction to his will; man's bounden duty, as well as happineſs? Or can man be free from the charge of baſeneſs and villainy in a flagrant degree, who is not thus diſpoſed towards GOD? But who is there ſo ignorant and impudent as to dare to deny, that the very reverſe of theſe tempers is the ſtate of heart and life in which every rich man and every poor man lives, till they are new creatures in CHRIST JESUS? In conſequence of ſuch a character, ſpirit, and practice, the deſert of every man, as of every capital offender, is to be cut off ——*for the wages of ſin is death*; and unleſs repentance is given us to the acknowledgment of the truth as it is in JESUS, death eternal muſt be every man's puniſhment.

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2. Priſoners for capital crimes are ſtung with remorſe for what they have done, till all ſenſe of their woeful ſtate is loſt in execrable hardneſs of heart, or intoxicating fumes of liquor: till every ſerious reflection on their caſe is thus drowned, how are they haunted with the idea of the evidence confronting them at the bar; the judge pronouncing their doom; the officers of juſtice dragging them forth, a public ſpectacle of infamy and terror; and the agonies of a violent death ſeizing upon their devoted bodies. Painful and bitter ſenſations indeed!—but by no means peculiar to condemned criminals. Every man, as ſoon as he comes to himſelf, feels more or leſs a ſimilar diſtreſs of mind. It is true, that youth, health, riches, honor, abetted by the mighty force of cuſtom, do much towards extinguiſhing all ſecret condemnation of heart for ſin. It is true alſo, education may be ſo ſhockingly profane; the vileſt examples, and none elſe ſo early ſeen, and infidel lies ſo ſoon imbibed, that men may often fancy themſelves innocent, nay often ſwell with conceit of perſonal merit, till ſudden deſtruction ſeizes them. Whilſt a fear of ridicule, or of being thought worſe than others, or ſtigmatized with cowardice, compels many to conceal the painful accuſations of conſcience. But as ſoon as you underſtand the properties of ſin, what

contempt it caſts upon the all-wiſe; what defiance it breathes out againſt the Almighty; what an infinite abomination it muſt neceſſarily be in the eyes of perfect purity: whenever you underſtand theſe things, your thoughts will trouble you; remorſe and ſelf-reproach will be keenly felt in your ſoul. Then, till your peace is made, and your pardon ſealed, the inevitable trial, the heart-ſearching GOD, and the eternal doom, reſerved for all who die in their ſins, will come with terror upon your mind; and a conſtant anxiety will be felt in the bottom of your ſoul, to know wherewith you muſt come before the Lord, and what you muſt do to be ſaved?

3. Capital offenders are treated amongſt all nations with rigor. Upon their commitment they are immediately ſhut out from all the comforts good citizens enjoy, loaded with chains, and after conviction caſt into a dungeon. Compare but for a moment what man in innocence did once poſſeſs; what, after death, if found in Chriſt, he will again, with the circumſtances of our abode on earth; and the proof is palpable, that we are all treated as priſoners, by our Almighty Maker and Judge. For are we not born to trouble and toil, to ſickneſs and pain, and grief and death? Evils which had no exiſtence in man's firſt eſtate; which have no place amongſt the ſpirits of the juſt made perfect:

fect: with ſin they entered, and with ſin they ceaſe forever. And what better than a ſpacious priſon, is this ſublunary world, till our light is come, and the glory of the Lord is riſen upon us? till the love of GOD, the proper happineſs of immortal ſpirits, is ſhed abroad in the heart? Like a priſon alſo is our abode here, through the rage of ſelfiſh paſſions, by which men continually moleſt and harraſs each other; and, were it not for reſtraining grace, and guardian laws, would actually devour one another. Who can recount the outrages, private, public, and national, which ſtain the diary of man?—Or the ruinous diffuſive miſchiefs done by luſt and avarice, malice, ambition, and revenge?—How numerous, how heavy the penalties to prevent one man's injuring another! How ſpeedy the returns of theſe courts of aſſize in every little diſtrict, to take cognizance of evil doers! Yet, after all, how frequent and terrible the inroads of human violence on domeſtic peace, and the good order of ſociety!

To carry the parallel between man and capital offenders no further—Theſe are impriſoned to be brought to trial, and, upon conviction according to law, ſentenced to ſuffer a ſhameful death. The law, their high and mighty accuſer, pays no regard to their perſons, or fond pleas to eſcape, or agonizing cries for mercy. Nothing

but

but blood can pay the forfeit. Nothing but blood deter others, from treading in their ſteps. Exactly the ſame is the caſe with us. What man is he that liveth, whom death will not arreſt, as the purſuivant of juſtice, to place him at the bar of GOD? *It is appointed for all men once to die, and after that the judgment. As I live, ſaith the Lord, every knee ſhall bow to me, and every tongue confeſs. So then, every one of us, muſt give account of himſelf to GOD. The hour cometh, when every eye ſhall ſee the great white throne, and him that ſitteth on it, from whoſe face the heavens and the earth ſhall flee away, and there ſhall be no place found for them. And the dead, ſmall and great, ſhall ſtand before GOD, and the books ſhall be opened, and the dead ſhall be judged, every man according to their works. And the wicked ſhall go into everlaſting puniſhment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

Thus full and clear is the proof, from our character, feelings, and treatment, that, in the ſight of GOD, we are all regarded as priſoners. *The ſcripture hath concluded all under ſin; and what the law ſaith, it ſaith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be ſtopped, and the* whole *world become* guilty *before GOD.*

How awful does the reign of impartial juſtice appear in this whole view of man's condition, by reaſon of ſin! May it pleaſe thee, O Father of mercies, to give us grace,

 that

that we may not be found condemned priſoners, at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. JESUS, the WAY, by whom we can have acceſs to thee, and remiſſion of our ſins, is preached unto us; open now the eyes of all preſent to behold him, and mightily perſuade every heart to turn to him.

Tho' the whole human race, no leſs than rebel angels, deſerve perdition: ſee, with pleaſing wonder, GOD's diſtinguiſhing love to man! He, is a priſoner of hope; they, are reſerved in everlaſting chains of darkneſs, to the judgment of the great day. They once roſe up againſt GOD as an enemy, and are loſt without remedy. So rich is the grace of CHRIST, ſo mighty his arm to ſave, that whilſt there is life, there is no reaſon to conclude the caſe of any ſinner paſt recovery; for *the Son of man is come to ſeek, and to ſave, that which was loſt. I have given thee* (ſaith GOD ſpeaking to him), *to bring out the priſoners from the priſon, and them that ſit in darkneſs from the priſon-houſe. By the blood of thy covenant, have I ſent forth thy priſoners, out of the pit, in which there was no water. Turn ye to the ſtrong hold, ye priſoners of hope.*

A ſtrong hold, or fortreſs, is a place of ſafety for thoſe to flee to, who have no might to withſtand their enemies on even ground, or decide the quarrel by their perſonal valour: a beautiful ſignificant image,

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expreſſing in one ſingle word, the certain immediate ſalvation which the priſoner of hope obtains, by turning to the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

This was the ſecond point to be proved. And the proof ariſes from what JESUS did, and ſuffered; from the ſtipulated condition, on which his active and paſſive obedience was offered up to GOD; and from the glory of his perſon, imparting infinite merit to all his work. Each of theſe particulars concurring, pardon of all manner of ſin and wickedneſs, can be extended to the guilty and loſt. It can be extended in a way moſt brightly diſplaying every perfection of GOD, and moſt effectually maintaining his authority amongſt men. For JESUS, in his own perſon, fulfilled all righteouſneſs, all obedience the law required; and after having thus magnified and made it honourable, he ſtill farther declared the righteouſneſs of GOD, by being made a *curſe* for offending man, *i. e.* he endured every kind of evil, ſin itſelf deſerves. He ſuffered poverty and contempt, reproach and perſecution, all his life; and in his death, he endured torment of body, general execration from men, and inconceivable anguiſh of ſoul, whilſt the ſword of eternal juſtice cut him off, for the tranſgreſſion of GOD's people. In that hour, upon which the admiration of all the armies of the ſaved,

and the whole hoſt of heaven, will be fixed for ever, his pangs were like the guilt which they expiated, abſolutely inexpreſſible and unexampled. But both his divine obedience to the law was performed, and its curſe borne, upon this grand inviolable compact, that if the Lord JESUS *ſhould make his ſoul an offering for ſin, he ſhould ſee the travail of his ſoul, and be ſatisfied. He ſhould juſtify many* (many as the ſands on the ſea ſhore), *and the pleaſure of the Lord ſhould proſper in his hands.* It was upon condition, that by his obedience, who is the ſecond man, all his children ſhould be made no leſs effectually righteous unto ſalvation, than by the offence of Adam, the firſt man, they were brought under judgment to condemnation: that as by one, ſin hath reigned unto death, even ſo might grace reign through righteouſneſs by one, unto eternal life.—The ſame everlaſting efficacy, to ſave, here aſcribed to the active obedience of JESUS, is as poſitively affirmed of his precious blood-ſhedding. *This man, after he had offered one ſacrifice for ſins, for ever ſat down on the right hand of GOD. From henceforth expecting* (in virtue of the covenant, by which he became man) *till his enemies, (i. e.* all who ſeek to hurt or deſtroy his church) *become his footſtool; for by one offering, he hath perfected for ever, them that are ſanctified,* Heb. x. 12. 14.

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You ſee how clear and full the warrant is from GOD's own word, to affirm, that the condition on which JESUS fulfilled the righteouſneſs of the law, and bore its curſe, was that his church might be ſaved through his perſonal work alone.

If you aſk, How can theſe things be? How is it poſſible the obedience and death of JESUS can be the whole juſtification and ſalvation of all, who ſhall inherit the kingdom? The context, in perfect harmony with numberleſs ſcriptures, anſwers very ſatisfactorily this important queſtion. It is from the infinite glory of the perſon of CHRIST: when this prophecy was penned, he was called the king of Iſrael. But no other was the king of Iſrael ſupreme, but Jehovah himſelf. With majeſty inſupportable, at Sinai, he proclaimed himſelf their *Lord*, and the whole congregation there pledged their faith to him; conſequently, ſince the church is commanded to receive him, who rode into Jeruſalem on an aſs, as the king of Iſrael, he muſt be VERY GOD. How all-ſufficient then muſt be the efficacy of his obedience and ſacrifice! And by his becoming a ſurety and ſubſtitute for his church, the propitiation he made for ſin, at once demonſtrates its infinite provocation; vindicates from future contempt the divine authority, in the eyes of all who know this fact; and by his obedience, a divine righteouſneſs is brought in,

in, imputed to every one who believeth; and in virtue of both, GOD can be juſt, and yet the juſtifier of the ungodly.

So wonderful is the conſtitution of CHRIST's perſon: ſo perfect the work he accompliſhed in the days of his fleſh. From whence it appears moſt evident, that he is a ſtrong hold, able to ſave every priſoner who *turns* to him. Who turns to him, as the wounded Iſraelites turned to the brazen ſerpent, for healing and for life: or as the man-ſlayer to the city of refuge, for ſafety from the avenger of blood. Such concern, ſuch longing to be found in CHRIST, under the protection of his atonement againſt all charges and accuſers; and under his wing, for ſafety from all enemies, with an utter deteſtation of every falſe confidence before cheriſhed; all this experimental knowledge of extreme danger from ſin, and of ſalvation in JESUS CHRIST alone, is indiſpenſably neceſſary, to make an inhabitant of the rock of ages, the church's ſtrong hold. The gracious command here addreſſed to condemned priſoners to turn to it, is enforced by the moſt alluring inducement. It is enforced by the promiſe, the abſolute promiſe, not of a diſtant or precarious bleſſing, but of immediate reception, of everlaſting ſecurity, and the moſt plenteous redemption. *For to day*, ſaith the Lord, *do I*

declare, I will render unto thee, double. As if he had ſaid, Condemned priſoner, turn to me, to ſave thee; and ſo far from finding thyſelf diſappointed in thy hope, I will exceed thy higheſt expectations: I will beſtow upon thee, an accumulation of ſpiritual bleſſings. Without difference or exception, every individual priſoner who turns to me, ſhall receive juſtification, and the ſpirit of adoption, and the joy of the Holy-Ghoſt, and the love of GOD, with a teſtamentary right here to eternal life, and after death, the matchleſs bleſſing itſelf.

A fortreſs thus amply provided, and moſt richly ſtored, with all that can relieve and bleſs the ſouls of men, is CHRIST the Lord.

Suffer me now to make an application of this central truth of the Bible, to every man's conſcience in the ſight of GOD.

1. Then, I would preſs you earneſtly to conſider this truth, who have been guilty of the greateſt crimes, and run the moſt terrible lengths in wickedneſs. Too well you know, that the firſt moment you think of returning to GOD, mountains of guilt encompaſs you on every ſide, and the cry of your ſins appalls you: you are ready to ſink under the thought, that it is now too late. All is loſt; ſuch a flagrant rebel as I have been, can have no reaſonable hope, you think, of ſalvation. Beſides,

could

could all that is paſt, the long, long, catalogue of horrid offences be blotted out: ſtill how can the Ethiopian change his ſkin? How can I ever lead a life oppoſite to the native bent of my heart; oppoſite to the mighty force of confirmed habit; oppoſite to the way of all my friends and intimates in the world; and oppoſite to the pleaſing ſollicitation of thoſe vile paſſions, which I never could withſtand, though with bittereſt vexation I have called myſelf a fool and a very madman, for yielding to them? Can a wretch in theſe circumſtances receive at once a free full pardon, with a defence againſt the tyrannous rage of every vile paſſion for the time to come? Such reaſonings as theſe very naturally agitate the mind of every ſinner, whoſe numerous and great offences are ſet before him. Nor can any hope, or relief poſſibly be given in the caſe, but from the knowledge of the ſtrong hold, CHRIST JESUS, which ſovereign mercy has provided. Turn to it, whoſe friendly, all-ſufficient protection is promiſed to all who flee thither, from a ſenſe of the wrath due to their ſins. The moſt audacious rebel on earth is as welcome here, when in ſincerity he deſires its defence, as the leaſt tranſgreſſor amongſt men. Hear with what an alluring voice of tendereſt love, ſinners are invited hither: *Ho! every one that thirſteth, let him come unto* ME *and drink, and out of his belly*

belly ſhall flow rivers of living water, i. e. he ſhall not only receive a pardon, but the gift of the Holy Ghoſt. *Whoſoever cometh unto me, I will in no wiſe caſt out.* This free compleat ſalvation to a ſelf-deſtroyed ſinner, is a gift worthy the GOD of all grace to beſtow; a gift ſuited to the infinite price paid for it, when CHRIST ſhed his blood to obtain it—a gift never refuſed to any rebel, who turns unto the Lord. *For he ſatisfieth the longing ſoul, and filleth the hungry ſoul with goodneſs: ſuch as ſit in darkneſs and the ſhadow of death, becauſe they have rebelled againſt the words of* GOD, *and contemned the counſel of the Moſt High: they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he ſaves them out of their diſtreſs.*

But is it not much eaſier for GOD to pardon ſins which are in number few, and of the common ſize, than ſuch wonderful and horrible wickedneſs, you may ſay, as mine has been? No; for this plain reaſon. The one grand obſtacle in the way of any tranſgreſſor's being received to mercy upon his return to GOD, is the broken law, the letter that killeth. This no one can take away, but He who ſpeaketh in righteouſneſs, mighty to ſave. Whether we have been decent, or ſcandalous; whether we are young, or grey headed in the practice of ſin; whether we have plunged ever ſo dreadfully into wickedneſs before faith in

CHRIST, or been baſe backſliders after, the way of ſalvation, is one and the ſame, turning to the ſtrong hold. No ſaint upon earth can plead innocence before this law, any more than liars, drunkards, thieves, adulterers, or even murderers themſelves. *GOD be merciful to me a ſinner*, through the atonement: *ſave, Lord JESUS, or I periſh*, is the only way and language, in which the holieſt man breathing muſt draw nigh to GOD, or be an offence unto him: and, the villain whoſe enormities make the ear which hears them tingle, when he is brought to utter from his heart the ſame words, and truly to turn to the ſame Saviour, will be as ſoon accepted, and as certainly ſaved: *for the ſame Lord over all is rich in mercy to all them that call upon him. For whoſoever calleth in the name of the Lord, ſhall be ſaved.* This mercy David experienced, as the Holy-Ghoſt records: *I ſaid I will confeſs my ſin unto the Lord, and* ſo *thou* forgaveſt *the iniquity of my ſin. Purge me with hyſſop* (that ancient type of the blood of Chriſt) *and I* (ſays David) *ſhall be clean*; tho' ſtained with the crimes of the depeſt dye, *waſh me, and I ſhall be whiter than ſnow.* This mercy, Manaſſeh found immediately upon his application to GOD for it. Though the moſt impious ſon of the beſt of fathers; though he had filled Jeruſalem with the blood of the ſaints; though, with a degree of heaven-daring impudence ſcarce imagi-

imaginable, he had ſet up an idol in the very temple of Jehovah, yet even this Manaſſeh, when bonds and impriſonment were bleſſed to bring him to himſelf, and he beſought the Lord, and humbled himſelf greatly, was accepted. This mercy and free grace, to mention no more inſtances, the murderers of Jeſus, many of them experienced; and Paul, the bittereſt enemy to his name—they turned to him, were immediately forgiven, were preſerved in this ſtrong hold, and finally ſaved. O that this glorious truth was known from the riſing of the ſun to the going down thereof. So ſhould no one any longer ſtay away from GOD, deterred by the greatneſs of his provocations; nor in deſpair of ſalvation, ſell himſelf to work wickedneſs. No, though your ſins, alas! have been in number beyond reckoning, and many of a crimſon dye, hear the word of the Lord: *Turn ye*, ſaith he, *to the ſtrong hold, for* to day *do I declare, that I will render unto thee, double. Turn ye at my reproof, behold I will pour out my ſpirit upon you.* The ſpirit of love and of power, and of a ſound mind. You ſhall become a new creature, the workmanſhip of GOD in CHRIST JESUS.

2. I would apply this moſt glorious truth in the Bible, CHRIST a ſtrong hold to ſave condemned priſoners, to you, who are of a character totally the reverſe of thoſe I have been addreſſing. By a very

regular courſe of life, and a conſcientious regard to all the duties of your ſtation in it, you have gained much eſteem. No wonder then, if ignorant of the word of GOD, you ſhould think yourſelf no leſs pleaſing to him on account of our own goodneſs, that you are to men. Not having ſinned in the manner and degree many or moſt have done, no wonder you are led to conclude, you need not any deep humiliation for ſin, or a ſtrong hold to flee unto, as much as the vileſt ſinners, whoſe manners you could never bear. But in this concluſion you both groſsly and moſt fatally err, not knowing the ſcripture. For the law of GOD does not, as you imagine, condemn only immoral conduct, or what men call flagrant violations of his law; but it condemns every ſin, and every degree of ſin whatever, under the penalty of eternal death. Becauſe, whatever does wrong to infinite majeſty and excellence, is moſt juſtly deemed a *capital* offence. So that one ſingle lie, one paſſionate word without cauſe, one wanton look, one proud thought, or covetuous deſire, or evil purpoſe, is a moſt certain forfeiture of your ſoul, into the hands of eternal juſtice. The ſentence of the Almighty, *(curſed is every one, that continueth not in all things written in the book of this law, to do them)* inſtantly is incurred; and muſt be executed in every caſe, where a good life and moral

moral character is confided in at all for juſtification before GOD, unleſs that obedience and moral character is abſolutely without a flaw. But this you do not even pretend is your caſe. You do not attempt to deny the charge, that you have done many wrong things, ſpoke unadviſedly and fooliſhly with your tongue, felt, if not openly diſcovered, pride, and envy, and vanity, and many fooliſh and hurtful deſires. Now, as this is your condition, you as well as others are a very guilty ſinful creature. Know then, your true character. Remember GOD looketh to the heart. Before him the thought of fooliſhneſs is ſin, and the wages of ſin by his decree, eternal death. Of old he appointed a bleeding ſacrifice to atone even for ſins of ignorance: and an high-prieſt to bear the iniquity of the holy things, offered up by his faithful people. *And without ſhedding of blood, there is no remiſſion* for the leaſt propenſity of heart to evil, any more than for the actual commiſſion of the moſt ſcandalous offence. You will ſay this is levelling characters at a ſtrange rate. What advantage than has a conſtant conſcientious attention, that our behaviour be good and upright, above the contrary? I anſwer, in point of juſtification before GOD abſolutely none; for there is no difference between one man, and another here. All have ſinned, all are condemned, and

there

there is but one thing needful, one way of ſalvation for the leaſt, and for the chief of ſinners, turning to CHRIST JESUS, the ſtrong hold. Beſides, little reaſon have you to truſt in yourſelf as righteous, becauſe your character is reſpectable amongſt men; for it may be ſo, and ſtill you remain an abomination to GOD; becauſe you may be honeſt, and kind, and generous, and devout enough, to be very much admired; yet hate the wiſdom of GOD as fooliſhneſs, and give him to his face, the lie. In fact you do this very thing, whilſt you exalt your own virtues, and leſſen your guilt, till your moral character is made out by you, to be the direct contrary to what GOD affirms it is: For he affirms that all men, till created again, are corrupt and abominable. Now, if denying the neceſſity of ſuch a new creation, and entirely ignorant of its nature, your high ſtomach either reſents the charge of ſuch depravity; or, you maintain your religion and goodneſs ought to be weighed againſt your offences, and recommend you to GOD; in either caſe, you as much contend with him, and refuſe to obey the truth, as the vileſt profligate. The main difference between your character and his, in the ſight of GOD, is this—He oppoſes and diſhonours GOD to the offence even of the ſober and decent in many flagrant inſtances; you, with an

equal haughtineſs of ſpirit, flatly contradict what GOD has ſworn to be true, by the eſtimate you make of your own worth, and the way you take to enter into life. Now the ſcripture affirms, that open wickedneſs is not more hateful in the eyes of GOD than ſpiritual pride; nor any temper more oppoſite to what he delights in, than a heart attempting to eſtabliſh its own righteouſneſs, void of all ſelf-loathing, and dependance upon the Lord our righteouſneſs. *For every one that is proud in heart*, it is written, *is an abomination to GOD—and every one that exalteth himſelf, ſhall be abaſed.*

GOD give you, who have a good character, ſeriouſly to ponder theſe things, and examine the matter to the bottom. Then, as was the caſe with Paul, the great leader of the ſect of the Phariſees, your legal confidence will die, ſlain by the law. You will turn with deſire to be found in CHRIST, not having your own righteouſneſs which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of CHRIST, the righteouſneſs which is of GOD by faith. Then all your amiable qualities will no longer deceive yourſelf and others, nor be the fuel of your pride, but practiſed from unfeigned love to the truth, be both pleaſing to GOD and profitable to men. Then will your light ſhine forth in that beauty and glory peculiar to believers, in the exemplary

emplary diſcharge of all moral, ſocial, religious duties, accompanied with poverty of ſpirit, and dependance upon the blood and righteouſneſs of GOD our Saviour, for eternal life.

Laſtly, I would preſs you all to mark well the very different view of the goſpel, and of their ſtate who receive it, which the text preſents from the notion too generally entertained of both.—According to the modern faſhionable idea, the goſpel is a perfect rule of morals, exemplified in a divine character; and enforced by a clear proof of a reſurrection to a future ſtate of reward, or puniſhment. But, thanks be to GOD for his unſpeakable gift, the goſpel is in excellency as much higher than this, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Of all creatures, loſt ſouls excepted, we are moſt miſerable, if it is not ſo. For what a poor deficient thing is a rule of morals, or the certain confidence of a reſurrection, and a future ſtate, to men under condemnation of the law and of conſcience; to men aſſaulted from without, tempted from within, afflicted in conſcious ways; uncertain of enjoying any one ſingle creature-comfort they have for a day? What we abſolutely want, what the whole ſoul of man, awakened to any knowledge of himſelf, longs for, is righteouſneſs to juſtify before GOD, power to protect, the Holy Ghoſt to ſanctify, the

the love of GOD, and the peace of GOD, and aſſurance of everlaſting favour to comfort and rejoice the heart in the ſervice of Chriſt. The goſpel which the inſpired Penmen preach, is all this. Not ſimply a ſyſtem of doctrines, but a proclamation of gifts and bleſſings to be immediately enjoyed by faith. The good news of an impregnable ſtrong hold, CHRIST JESUS, who lives, who reigns, Omnipreſent and Almighty, to receive and ſave from the deſtroying power of law, of Satan, of the luſt of the fleſh, and of the eye, and from every foe, every individual who in deed and in truth comes to him, in debt, in guilt, and in diſtreſs. It is a ſolemn infallible aſſurance, that every one thus coming to him, ſhall experience their dwelling to be the munition of rocks, where their bread ſhall be ſafe, and their waters ſhall not fail.

Perfectly correſponding with this cheering, and highly magnificent idea, of the goſpel, is the *preſent ſtate* of thoſe who receive it, according to the ſcripture deſcription of it. Believers *are delivered from the power of darkneſs, and tranſlated into the kingdom of GOD's dear Son; in whom* they have *redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveneſs of ſins. They* are *bleſſed with all ſpiritual bleſſings in heavenly things in* CHRIST JESUS. *All things are theirs, things preſent, and things*

to come, whether life or death, and nothing ſhall ever ſeparate them from the love of GOD, which is in CHRIST JESUS their Lord. So that whilſt the chriſtianity generally preached and profeſſed, is an inſipid and unaffecting thing, nay abſurd to the laſt degree, in requiring men to give up the natural ſources of their pleaſure, and to wage war with their inbred luſts, at the command of an unknown GOD; without any promiſe or ſenſe of a preſent pardon, or any certainty of future glory; at the ſame time making the poor defective performances of man, the great object he is to look at: and, notwithſtanding the ſacrifice of CHRIST, denying that any one is to dare to preſume they are ſaved by that alone: the chriſtianity of the Bible is ſenſible and rational to the laſt degree; all is evident and demonſtrably true. It does indeed indiſpenſably require the diſciples of JESUS to forſake all; to be holy in all manner of converſation; to venture for GOD with a fearleſs integrity, and an unbounded affiance.—But this is, becauſe they have received the bleſſing from the Lord; it is becauſe he hath loved them, and waſhed them from their ſins—not merely or principally, in order to obtain eternal ſalvation.

Let the Deiſt look at this goſpel, and deſpiſe ſo rich a bleſſing, if he can.—Let him deride thoſe who receive it as enthuſiaſts, but he muſt

muſt confeſs, it is a happy ſtate: and could he ſee thouſands who have received the goſpel not in word only, but in power, and in much aſſurance, he might ſee peace reigning in the midſt of deepeſt poverty; joy, in the midſt of fiery trials; patience, in the pangs of fierceſt diſeaſe; and all the evil introduced by ſin, overcome by JESUS and his love. Let the formaliſt and the orthodox zealot; the one exact in a tireſome round of lifeleſs duties; the other intolerant and perſecuting for lifeleſs notions, look at this, and ſee what a pitiful, contemptible thing, they ſubſtitute for the nobleſt offspring of heaven, for GOD's beſt gift to men.

Happy ſhould I be, could I perſuade you, ſirs, to make yourſelves an experiment of the power, the grace, the plenteous redemption there is in this ſtrong hold! Then, and not till then, will you be ſafe; and your ſoul find reſt amidſt all the temptations, croſſes, and trials of a ſin-diſordered world, and a corrupt heart. Then, though you may loſe ſoon, very ſoon, the deareſt earthly comforts, you will be able to loſe them all with reſignation, with peace of mind, with thankfulneſs, and great advantage to your immortal ſoul. Becauſe the loſs of all, will give you an experimental proof, more convincing than a thouſand arguments, how true the Lord your ſtrong hold is, how permanent

and

and all-ſufficient to make up the loſs of all beſide. When you are ſafe in this ſtrong hold, you will depart in peace, and find it, even in death, a refuge. And in that great day, when every refuge of lies ſhall be ſwept away, and all the human race feel their want of the friendſhip of CHRIST—*When the mountains will quake, and the hills melt, and the earth ſhall be burnt at the preſence of the Lord—When his fury ſhall be poured out like fire, and the rocks be thrown down by him,* theſe ſcenes of inconceivable diſtreſs and horror, will only diſplay the excellency of your choice, the mighty bulwarks which ſurround you, the faithfulneſs of your Saviour, to the uttermoſt. Then will all the human race ſee the great ſeparation—They will ſee on the one hand, *how good the Lord is, what a ſtrong hold in the day of trouble, knowing them that truſt in him.* And on the other, what *an overflowing flood of wrath ſhall purſue his enemies,* Nah. i. 7. 8.

FINIS.

Errata. *In ſome of the Copies, p.* 23. *l.* 22. *for* turn *read* burn. P. 24. *l.* 22. *for* confidence *read* evidence: l. 27. *for* conſcious *read* various.

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